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ABSTRACT

Sentence combining exercises present material to the students to be mastered by processes similar to memorization. By taking ideas in short sentences and compacting them into larger sentences, students become familiar with the relationships between the ideas in the short sentences. At its best, sentence combining is a process that requires the manipulation of ideas. Students using this procedure must hold these ideas in their minds, make a choice on the relationship between the ideas, and then combine them with the appropriate connecting word. Since language always conveys meaning in context, it is important to have a context for language exercises: sentences without context lose much of their significance. A literary work (such as "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "The Bear," or "The Red Badge of Courage") offers such a context. The language of the original--in particular, the words and phrases in the reading--can be worked into any number of sentence types that are not physically present in the work of the literary master. (HOD)

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Among sentence combiners, there seems to be a clear line of demarcation. There are those such as Morenberg and his colleagues (1978) who act as though writing courses should focus on sentence combining to the exclusion of all other activities. This is the everything for everybody position. On the other hand, I have always insisted that sentence combining activities should be used in conjunction with all the other activities that a writing teacher uses to foster good writing on the part of students. I have never suggested that students should do sentence combining activities to the exclusion of all other kinds of writing activities. Although other methodologists such as Daiker, Kerek and Morenberg (1978) have conducted research on the assumption that sentence combining can be the sum and substance of a writing class, my position has always been that sentence combining is only part of a writing class. I have stated this position in the following words:

The point of this research on sentence-combining activities is that they are not supposed to constitute the only activity that students of written composition are exposed to at any given level. Sentence combining activities are ancillary to all the other activities that students should be engaged in with the direction of a competent teacher (Ney, 1978: 303).

Furthermore, I have always conducted research with this philosophy foremost in mind. In short, I believe in the position that sentence combining has something for somebody not everything for everybody.

If someone were to ask me: "What evidence do you have to support your contention?" I would reply that I have two different kinds of evidence to support my position. The first is evidence from the research of Smith and Combs (1980) which indicates that instructions given to students can have the same effect on student writing as sentence combining exercises. The second kind of evidence is theoretical in nature since research supports it only indirectly. This evidence is of two different kinds. The first has for its support my commitment to the idea of a liberal education. Within Western culture there is a tradition that must be passed on from one generation to the next. For writing, this tradition embraces the discipline of rhetoric. Here, there is a body of information dealing with the structure of formal

discourse which must be conveyed to students. Both Kinneavy (1979) and Mellon (1979) feel that such information is conveyed implicitly through sentence combining. But I would say that the attempt to rely on implicitly conveyed information is not enough. Such information should also be conveyed explicitly. The reason for this resides in the second kind of indirect evidence used to support my contention that rhetorical information should be presented explicitly. This kind of evidence focuses on the way that language is learned.

Language learning is accomplished in two different modes or stages. A researcher named William Gallagher recently described the existence of these two stages for language learning in a presentation titled, "Investigation of the Relationship Between Memorization and Rule Acquisition -- The Two Stage Language Acquisition Hypothesis" (1976). As a researcher, Gallagher traces this theory back to the psychologist John Hughlings Jackson (1932:130) who stated that:

. . . the right hemisphere (of the brain) is the one for the most automatic use of words, and the left, the one in which automatic use of words merges into voluntary use of words -- into speech. Otherwise stated, the right is the half of the brain for the automatic use of words, the left the half for both the automatic and the voluntary use. The expression I have

formerly used is that the left is the 'leading' half for words (speech).

He then goes on to explain just what he means by speech and to support his contention with reference to cases of brain damaged aphasics or aphasics who suffered from various diseases of the brain.

Gallagher starts with the Jackson model but he proceeds from there stating that in the brain " . . . linguistic forms are initially stored in neural areas separate from the creative language center" (1976:93). This thinking leads to the position that:

Two neurolinguistic hypotheses are considered in this paper: (1) features of language processed in the primary language area of the brain are different in nature from features processed in a posited initial processing area of the brain, and these differences are relevant to a description of language; and, (2) an increased memory load on the posited initial language processing area is responsible for the generation, projection and storage of mental grammar 'rules'" (1976:89).

From this point, language learning, as conceived by Gallagher,

requires a large amount of memorization which is the precursor of rule formation in the human brain. The reason for this is that the language learner first learns to memorize phrases through the use of imitation and that "... these phrases appear to accumulate until memory load forces the formation of a generalization or 'rule' . . ." (1976:93). Although the idea which he expresses is undoubtedly correct, the terminology which he employs at this point seems unfortunate since it is unlikely that overload on the memory 'forces' the brain of a language learner to do anything. It is more likely the case that the brain as a matter of its normal mode of operation uses two different strategies for the learning of language. In fact, Gallagher seems to say as much when he states that: "... imitation and memorization do play a role in acquisition of 'automatic' or 'formula' speech, which, may in turn, trigger 'rule' acquisition" (1976:93).

For support of this hypothesis, Gallagher cites a dichotic listening test which he himself devised and administered. In this test, 78 students who had acquired English as a second language listened to formulaic speech in the right ear and normally created sentences in the left ear for one experimental condition. For the other experimental condition the procedure was reversed. The error rate was significantly lower for the condition which would be the natural condition from the point of view of the theory; that is, with the formulaic expressions being

processed through the left ear for the right hemisphere of the brain and the "creative" sentences being processed through the right ear for the left hemisphere of the brain, the area in which the speech centers of the brain are located. Hence, dichotic listening tests tend to support his theory.

Then, he proceeds to review the literature for similar support. He finds this in writers such as Wilkins who think that ". . . memorized phrases appear to be localized to both hemispheres of the brain much like other kinds of knowledge acquired by imitation" (Wilkins 1972:161). Besides this kind of evidence, Gallagher cites individual case studies such as the one reported by Huang (1972) in which a young Chinese boy was found using "Get out of here!" in diverse situations whether or not the English phrase fit. The four - year - old child, Paul, used memorized phrases of this nature for at least one month before he started freely creating sentences of his own. From that time onwards, the freely created sentences were used side - by - side with formulaic expressions until the study was discontinued. He also cites the studies of Braine (1963) whose child had mastered 89 two word combinations by the fourth month but doubled the number of phrases which he mastered in each succeeding month, demonstrating that his speech had moved from the pure memorization phase to the rule-governed creative phase.

It would appear to this observer that all of the preceding

evidence does indeed support a two stage hypothesis for language acquisition, but it is curious that Gallagher does not find support for his hypothesis in the very nature of language itself. Students of foreign languages remember with pain the irregular verbs of any number of Indo-European tongues. Thus, it is easy for them to see how Spanish compran, 'they buy,' and compraron, 'they bought,' can be related to each other by rule but it is difficult to see how ponen, 'they put,' and pusieron, 'they put,' can be related by rule. The same could be said for English need and needed when they are compared with English go and went. The fact of the matter is that the irregular forms of a language must be memorized and stored differently from the regular forms which can be related to each other by rule. Or these same students might wonder at the irregularity in the Japanese verbs suru, 'do,' and kuru, 'come.' (See Hetzron (1975) for any number of phenomena such as these.) All languages have both regular and irregular forms and it would seem to this observer that such evidence would also support a two stage theory of language acquisition since the irregular forms of language must of necessity be memorized and stored as memorized items while the great bulk of language is produced by rules which govern the structure of sentences in utterances. Gallagher hints at the possibility of using this as evidence when he says that ". . . features of language processed in the primary language area of the brain are different in nature from features processed in a posited initial processing area of the brain, and these

differences are relevant to a description of language" (1976:89) but he never quite articulates the argument. He does, however, suggest the strategy that the argument implies when he writes ". . . If the hypothesis is correct, the anecdotal notion that learning a second language requires a great deal of memorization will be validated" (1976:979).

In any case, sentence combining fits well within such a view of language learning. Many aspects of sentence manipulation or sentence combining exercises contribute to those facets of language learning necessary for the first stage. They present material to the students to be mastered by processes similar to memorization. The didactic aspects used in the presentation of information here typified as part of the cultural tradition find their analog in the second stage of a two stage language learning process. In this aspect of the teaching of writing, information about the structure of sentences, including the nature and use of cumulative sentences, and information about rhetoric should be presented. This is similar to aspects of the second stage of language learning. It is in this sense that sentence combining has something for somebody but not everything for everybody. It has its analog in practice used for memorization in a two stage theory of language acquisition. But sentence combining is more than a simple procedure for memorizing sentence forms through manipulating sentences.

When I describe sentence combining, I normally talk about taking ideas in short sentences and compacting them into larger sentences in such a way that the relationships between the ideas in the short sentences are pointed out for the reader. It would appear that Sullivan (1979) and Palacas (1979) have the same view of the sentence combining process. Palacas (1979:192) writes about the fact that readers must " . . . infer intended logical connections between ideas." He then goes on to state that: " . . . the connective words or phrases of highly educated prose, though logically no different from connectives of ordinary speech, may be unfamiliar to the pen of the writer." He next suggests that:

The teacher's challenge, then, is to help students become as adept at communicating transition in writing as in speech. In accord with a concept familiar to exponents of sentence combining, we begin by assuming that students possess the requisite concepts for creating cohesive discourse. We need only to provide ways to elevate the student's tacit knowledge to a more conscious level, permitting him to make conscious choices appropriate to the writing context.

(The whole matter of raising knowledge to a conscious level is reminiscent of linguistic knowledge moving from one stage to another in the Gallagher model.) Sentence combining helps

students since they are manipulating ideas and choosing connective words which are useful in this process. Thus, a student might take the ideas in John felt sleepy / He was very tired and put them into a larger sentence in such a way that the reader does not miss the intended meaning of the writer: John felt sleepy because he was very tired. At its best, sentence combining is a process of this nature. It is a process which requires the manipulation of ideas. Students, using this procedure, must hold these ideas in their minds, make a choice on the relationship between the ideas and then combine them with the appropriate connecting word. In this sense, sentence combining offers something for somebody. It is to be hoped that it offers something for everybody, but it is not supposed to constitute the entire writing class in the sense of being everything for everybody.

In working from this position, I have always had students perform sentence combining exercises in the context of literary works of merit or currently used writing samples. Thus, I have had fourth graders read Washington Irving's 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' and I have had them performing sentence combining exercises with language from the tale of Ichabod Crane. Similarly, I have had sixth graders read 'The Bear' from Faulkner's Go Down Moses and perform sentence combining exercises with language from this miniature masterpiece. My first group of seventh graders did their sentence combining in the context of

language from Stephen Crane's 'The Red Badge of Courage.' The real value of using such prose as a source for the language in sentence combining exercises does not lie merely in the fact that students are meeting the classics. It lies also in the fact that students become closely acquainted with the manner in which ideas are compressed in prose and connected with transition words and logical connectors. With the use of models in sentence combining, the something for somebody philosophy is extended. But even at this point, the sentence combining is not the sum total of the writing activity. It is not intended to be everything for everybody in the class.

The manner in which sentence combining exercises can be cued to literary works of merit can be illustrated with an example from 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.' The first part of the tale reads as follows:

Sept. 20, 1976 THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW Name _____

At the head of one of the coves near the Hudson river, there lies a small market town or rural port, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally known by the name of Tarry Town. This name was given by the good housewives of the adjoining country because of the fact that their husbands lingered or tarried about the village tavern on market day. Not far from this village, perhaps about two miles, there is a little valley among high hills, which

high hills, which is one of the quietest places in the whole world. A small brook glides through it, with just enough noise to lull one to sleep. The occasional whistle of a quail or the tapping of a woodpecker is almost the only sound that ever breaks in upon the uniform tranquility. When I was a young boy, I remember my first squirrel hunt in a grove of tall walnut trees that shades one side of the valley. I had wandered into it at noon when everything is quiet and I was startled by the roar of my own gun. If I ever wanted a place to go to be quiet, I would think of this little valley.

From the lazy looking valley and the peculiar character of its residents, this little valley for a long time has been known as SLEEPY HOLLOW and the people who live there have been known as SLEEPY HOLLOW people. A drowsy dreamy influence seems to hang over the land in the air. Some people say that a doctor bewitched the place with his medicine. In any case, it is certain that the witching power of the place continues because the people all walk as if they are asleep. Besides this, the whole neighborhood has many stories about haunted places and all kinds of superstitions.

The most important ghost that haunts this valley, however, is a figure on horseback without a head. His haunts are not confined to the valley, but extend at times to the road all around and especially to the church which is quite close. Indeed, certain of the historians who have written about this ghost say that it is a soldier who comes out of his grave at night and rides his horse through the valley. In the morning, he rushes through the hollow as fast as he can because he is in a hurry to get back to his grave in the churchyard before daybreak.

A worksheet for students who were sentence combining as part of an individualized instruction project then would look like this:

Sept. 20, 1976 THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW NAME _____

Step 1: Read the page from the story about the Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Step 2: Answer the questions about what you have just read by checking the box.

1. The town is called Tarry Town because:

§_§ it is at the head of a cove.

§_§ husbands lingered in the tavern.

2. The valley is called Sleepy Hollow because:

§_§ there is very little noise in it.

§_§ there is no noise in it.

3. I know the valley is bewitched because:

§_§ there are stories about ghosts.

§_§ the people walk as if they are asleep.

4. The most famous ghost is:

§_§ a soldier who rides a horse which does
not have a head.

§_§ a soldier who does not have a head but
still rides a horse.

Step 3: Join the sentence below in the same way that
the example sentence has been joined.

Example:

At the head of a cove, there lies a town.

The town is small. The town is sleepy.

At the head of a cove, there lies a small sleepy town.

1. There is a valley among high hills.

The valley is quiet. The valley is little.

2. A brook glides through the valley.

The brook is clear. The brook is small.

3. I hunted in a grove of trees.

The trees were tall. The trees were straight.

4. An influence hangs over the land.

The influence is drowsy. The influence is dreamy.

5. He rides his horse through the valley.

The valley is dark. The valley is empty.

6. He rushes through the hollow.

The hollow is quiet. The hollow is sleepy.

Due to the fact that the lesson was early in the sequence of exercises, the sentence combining task, here, is quite simple. The same passage could have yielded the following sentences combining problems.

1. Relative clause formation - which:

At the head of a cove, there lies a small town.

The town is called Greensburgh.

At the head of a cove, there lies a small town
which is called Greensburgh.

2. Relative clause formation - that:

I remember a grove of walnut trees.

The grove of walnut trees shades one side of the
valley.

I remember a grove of walnut trees.

The grove of walnut trees shades one side of the
valley.

I remember a grove of walnut trees that shades
one side of the valley.

3. Adverbial clause of reason.

This name was given by the housewives.

Their husbands lingered or tarried in the town.

This name was given by the housewives because their
husbands lingered or tarried in the town.

4. Adverbial clause of time.

I was a young boy.

I hunted squirrel in the valley.

When I was a young boy, I hunted squirrel

in the valley.

5. Adverbial clause of condition.

I wanted a place to go to be quiet.

I would think of this place.

If I wanted a place to go to be quiet, I
would think of this place.

All of the adverbial clauses are amenable to practice in both initial and final position. Furthermore, there are ample examples for exercises with what Hunt calls near-clauses such as He is in a hurry to get back to his grave. Such exercises are built from the vocabulary of the original but it is not necessary to limit the exercises to the structures or the vocabulary in the original. The original provides the ideational setting for the exercises. Since language always means in context, it is important to have a context for language exercises. Sentences without context lose much of their significance. Besides this, the literary work provides the language for the creation of sentences for the exercises. The language of the original, in particular, the words and phrases in the reading, can be worked into any number of sentence types that are not physically present in the work of the literary master.

What then of the future of sentence combining? There is no doubt in my mind that sentence combining will continue to be a very useful device for the teaching of composition. At this point, however, no researchers have adequately identified the students who benefit most from sentence combining activities. We know that young students can be separated into groups according to the cognitive styles that they use to process information. Already, a lot of research has been done with the language processing of students who have been classified as impulsives or reflectives. The same could be said of field dependent students when they are contrasted to field independent students or synthetic as opposed to analytic students. From research in second language learning, it would appear that analytic or reflective students need sentence combining exercises less than the synthetic or impulsive students (Chastain, 1969). But as yet, researchers have not identified students according to cognitive style and then exposed them to sentence combining activities. In any case, sentence combining exercises will continue to be an important part of programs for the teaching of written composition. Mina Shaughnessy understands this when she states:

The practice of consciously transforming sentences from simple to complex structures (and vice versa), of compounding the parts of sentences, of transforming

independent clauses into dependent clauses, of collapsing clauses into phrases or words helps the student cope with complexity in much the same way as finger exercises in piano or bar exercises in ballet enable performers to work out specific kinds of coordination that must be virtually habitual before the performer is free to interpret or even execute a total composition (1977:77).

It is in this sense that sentence combining has something for somebody, not everything for everybody. It focuses on that part of the composing process which liberates students to go on to the higher parts.

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